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**Title:** Joseph Conrad's A Personal Record: An Anti-confessional Autobiography

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**Citation style:** Adamowicz-Pośpiech Agnieszka. (2008). Joseph Conrad's A Personal Record: An Anti-confessional Autobiography. W: W. Kalaga, M. Kubisz, J. Mydla (eds.), "Repetition and recycling in literary and cultural dialogues" (S. 87-98). Częstochowa: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Lingwistycznej.



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## JOSEPH CONRAD'S *A PERSONAL RECORD*: AN ANTI-CONFESSIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

Joseph Conrad, as a well-known novelist, commencing to pen reminiscences about the beginnings of his nautical career and his first steps as an English writer, faced an essential dilemma.<sup>1</sup> On one hand, the need to order and make meaningful the decisions and events from his past was so compelling that it urged the writer to create his memoirs; on the other, Conrad's distrust of direct confession, unequivocal externalization of his intimate "self" made him choose the literary form of loose remembrances based on apparently chaotic associations referring to people and events from the past. The result was a collection of seemingly disconnected vignettes portraying different episodes from the author's days of yore. The aim of this paper is firstly, to establish to what extent Conrad's volume, *A Personal Record*, is an autobiography, secondly, to consider whether it is possible to create an anti-confessional autobiography, and last but not least, to disclose the techniques that Conrad uses to reduce the confessional character of his recollections.

### AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY?

As regards the distinctive generic features of autobiographic writing the French scholar and critic, Philippe Lejeune, enumerates four conditions which verify whether a given text belongs to the autobiographic convention:

1) narrative form (story, prose); 2) subject (life of an individual, development of a personality); 3) author's position: identity of the author (whose name refers to a real person) and the narrator; 4) narrator's status (identity of the narrator and the main character, retrospective vision of the story);<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The article is an expanded version of a paper presented in Polish at the conference "Świat przez pryzmat 'Ja'" [The World Through the 'I' Prism] held in Katowice on December 3-5 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Philippe Lejeune, „Pakt autobiograficzny” [Autobiographic Pact], in: *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu. O autobiografii* [Variations on a Certain Pact. On Autobiography], ed. and trans. Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska (Kraków: Universitas, 2001), p. 29. I have used two ver-

In Conrad's *A Personal Record* all those requirements are fulfilled. It is a collection of prose sketches whose theme deals with the writer's vicissitudes. The author is identical with the narrator and the narrator with the main protagonist (with some exceptions). Lejeune accentuates the sameness of the author's, narrator's and main character's name which is documented by a signature. This signature is a binding sign of the so called "autobiographic pact."<sup>3</sup> This "pact" exists explicitly in Conrad's text since the narrator and at the same time the main character share the identical name with the author (i.e. Joseph Conrad).

However, in Conrad's case one has to distinguish between the émigré's authentic name and his assumed name as a writer. Is this contract between the reader and the author violated if the writer uses a *nom de plum*? It is well known that the Anglophile name Joseph Conrad is an artistic pseudonym of the Polish nobleman and emigrant Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski. Lejeune dissolves this problem stating that those two different names are equivalent "pseudonym being the author's professional name."<sup>4</sup> Yet, with Conrad the matter becomes more complicated when we consider *A Personal Record* in particular. Since the official pseudonym that the Polish émigré chose at the onset of his writing career is relegated to the title page only while the foreword to the collection is signed for the first and the only time with an odd hybrid comprising initial letters of his assumed name and authentic surname: J. C. K (Joseph Conrad Korzeniowski). By fusing both names, Conrad apparently wanted to enhance the generic status of his reminiscences as a form of autobiography.

Another factor that might superficially lessen the autobiographic value of Conrad's recollections is that the basic feature of autobiography, regarded as constitutive in most monographs, namely searching for the answer to the question "who am I," "what kind of man am I"<sup>5</sup> – serves in this volume only as a backdrop for seemingly disconnected family stories. It seems that the major incentive for Conrad to commence his reminiscences was the need to show the world (but also himself) the decisions and events from his past as pre-planned, and consistent steps towards the aim he had once set himself.<sup>6</sup>

sions of Lejeune's article: an earlier one, "Pakt autobiograficzny" (1975) and a modified, later version, "Pakt autobiograficzny (bis)" (1986). All translations from Polish into English were done by the author of this article

<sup>3</sup> Lejeune, *Wariacje*, p. 31 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Lejeune, *Wariacje*, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> Regina Lubas-Bartoszyńska, *Pisanie autobiograficzne w kontekstach europejskich* [Autobiographic Writing in European Contexts] (Katowice: Śląsk, 2003), p. 29.

<sup>6</sup> This thesis is unanimously upheld among Conradian biographers. Cf. Frederick Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives. A Biography* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1979); Zdzisław Najder: *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego* [The Life of Conrad-Korzeniowski] (Warszawa: Alfa, 1996).

He wants the reader to believe that on leaving Poland in 1874, his objective was to serve in the British mercantile fleet (which according to Conrad, sprung from a conscious decision to be an English sailor). Secondly, he wishes to present the time when he was living in England and decided to write in the English language (which again was to stem from almost a natural inclination to compose his initial work in the language of Dickens and Trollope) as a momentous resolution to become a writer. Which is definitely not true.<sup>7</sup> Thus we see that the mainspring for Conrad's memoirs would be the need to perceive and present his own life as a goal-oriented chain of events.

Still, according to Georges Gusdorf, a specialist and historian of personal writings, to imbue with sense one's own existence, is also a frequent motive for composing many autobiographies: "writing about oneself – these are remarks on the subject of one's self, it is identifying oneself. At the base of it there is the ontological experience of the perception of the lack of existence [...]. It seems that the sense of life is not directly accessible and one must search for a second-hand revelation."<sup>8</sup> Gusdorf formulates it even more explicitly, as if falling into line with Conrad's motives: "to write down one's life means intervening into it, instilling the record with the need for clarity."<sup>9</sup> Those statements pinpoint the causes for which Conrad undertook the challenge of writing about himself.<sup>10</sup> They are analogous to the confident assertions he made in *A Familiar Preface to A Personal Record*. Defending the chaotic form of narration and conversational tone of the volume its author explained:

These memories put down without any regard for established conventions have not been thrown off without system and purpose. They have their hope and their aim. The hope that *from the reading of these pages there may emerge at last the vision of a personality*; the man behind the books so fundamentally dissimilar as, for instance, "Almayer's Folly" and "The Secret Agent," and yet *a coherent, justifiable personality both in its origin and in its action*.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of Conrad's automythologising see Karl's and Najder's biographies.

<sup>8</sup> Georges Gusdorf, *Les Écritures du moi* (Paris, 1991), p. 92. Qtd. in: Lubas Bartoszyńska, *Pisanie autobiograficzne*, p. 189.

<sup>9</sup> Gusdorf, *Les Écritures du moi*, p. 92. Qtd. in: Lubas Bartoszyńska, *Pisanie autobiograficzne*, p. 189.

<sup>10</sup> Most Conradians in their critical essays on *A Personal Record* mention these reasons. Cf. Jacques Berthoud, *The Major Phase* (Cambridge: CUP, 1978), pp. 3-19; Zdzisław Najder, "Introduction," in: Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea & Personal Record* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. xix-xxi.

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Conrad, *The Mirror of the Sea and Personal Record* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. xxi. Emphasis added. Hereafter abbreviated as PR and quoted in parentheses within the main text.

In this passuss the writer overtly mentions the aim that the collection of reminiscences should fulfill, namely to depict its author as a consistent and persevering man, pursuing and successfully achieving his goals.

### CONFESSION OR TESTIMONY?

Conrad wanted to write about himself from a particular perspective – giving his own interpretation of events, but at the same time he rejected the confessional mode of autobiography à la Jean Jacques Rousseau, making him his major adversary on the pages of not only this volume.<sup>12</sup> He intuitively recognized that Rousseau's *Confessions* were an exceptional masterpiece which opened up a new path among well-trodden literary conventions or even, as many critics believe, founded a new genre.<sup>13</sup> Conrad's anti-Rousseau stance has been spotted for the first time by a British philosopher and the writer's friend, Bertrand Russell:

His [Conrad's] point of view, one might say was the antithesis of Rousseau's "Man is born in chains, but he can become free." He becomes free, so I believe Conrad would have said, not by letting loose his impulses, not by being casual and uncontrolled, but by subduing wayward impulses to a dominant purpose. [...] Conrad's point of view was far from modern. In the modern world there are two philosophies: the one which stems from Rousseau, and sweeps aside all discipline as unnecessary; the other, which finds its fullest expression in totalitarianism, which thinks of discipline as essentially imposed from without. Conrad adhered to the older tradition, that discipline should come from within. He despised indiscipline, and hated discipline that was merely external.<sup>14</sup>

Hence Conrad's categorical refusal to accept any human conduct if it was only based on man's good intentions, stemmed from a fundamental refutation of the ethics of "moral naturalism" based on the conscience of an individual.<sup>15</sup> In such an ethical system conscience not reason points to what

<sup>12</sup> Conrad mentions Jean-Jacques Rousseau also in *Lord Jim*, *Under Western Eyes*. Cf. Zdzisław Najder, "Conrad and Rousseau," in: *Conrad in Perspective. Essays on Art and Fidelity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 139-152.

<sup>13</sup> Nowadays Rousseau is considered to be the founder of modern autobiography. Cf. Lejeune, „Czy można zdefiniować autobiografię?” [Is It Possible to Define Autobiography?], in: *Wariacje na temat pewnego paktu*, p. 3; Patrick Coleman, "Introduction" to Jean-Jacque Rousseau, *Confessions*, trans. Angela Scholar (Oxford: OUP 2000), pp. vii, xxix.

<sup>14</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Portraits from Memory and Other Essays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1956), pp. 86-88.

<sup>15</sup> "Naturalism" in ethics or the so called "moral naturalism" was based on the assumption that "man existed in nature not contaminated with guilt, not ordered by laws, but inherently good, and not spoiled by 'civilization'" (Vernon J. Bourke, *Historia etyki* [History of Ethics]

is good and right. It is regarded as a "God's instinct, eternal and divine voice."<sup>16</sup>

Zdzisław Najder carried out a contrastive analysis of Conrad's attitude towards the author of *Confessions*, introducing a polemic with Russell as well. First and foremost, the British philosopher misquotes the famous initial line of *The Social Contract* which reads as follows: "L'homme est né libre et partout il est dans les fers." "Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains."<sup>17</sup> Additionally, both tendencies in modern philosophies are present in Rousseau's writings. But on the whole, Russell's thesis is well-founded and deserves expatiating on.<sup>18</sup> Najder claims that although the Frenchman's socio-political views are contradictory, his moral standpoints seem unambiguously outlined in *Confessions*:

The outspoken advocate of equality assures us that he is not "one of those low born men" without "a real sentiment of justice." The claim to uniqueness is thus coupled with a claim to goodness. The seat of goodness is his heart whatever the evidence of his actions may say.<sup>19</sup>

Whereas the principles which Conrad conveyed in his works (i.e. of restraint, soberness, duty, loyalty and fidelity) and above all which he complied with in his life, placed him on the other conceptual extreme to Rousseau and commanded profound distrust towards unbridled emotionalism:

So I [Conrad] proceed in peace to declare that *I have always suspected in the effort to bring into play the extremities of emotions the debasing touch of insincerity.* In order to move others deeply we must deliberately allow ourselves to be carried away beyond the bounds of our normal sensibility-innocently enough, perhaps, and of necessity [...]. But the danger lies in the writer becoming the victim of his own exaggeration, losing the exact notion of sincerity, and in the end coming to despise truth itself as something too cold, too blunt for his purpose – as, in fact, not good enough for his insistent emotion. (*PR* xviii, emphasis added)

tłum. Aleksander Białek (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1994), p. 167). Cf. Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, trans. F. Philip (Oxford: OUP, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Władysław Tatarkiewicz, *Historia filozofii* [History of Philosophy] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1981), vol. II, p. 153.

<sup>17</sup> J. J. Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, transl. M. Cranston (Harmondsworth: Penguin 1968), p. 49. Qtd. in: Najder, "Conrad and Rousseau," p. 144. However, in the latest translation of Rousseau's work its translator, Christopher Betts, points to the fact that the opening sentence of *The Social Contract* has long been mistranslated: "Man was born free: in French 'L'homme est né libre,' often translated and quoted as 'Man is born free,' which would be the equivalent of 'L'homme naît libre.'" The past implies that natural liberty existed once; the present that it exists for every man at birth (...)." Ch. Betts, *Explanatory Notes* to Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 183, note 45. Why two diff. references to two diff. editions (translations?) of the same text by Rousseau? Perhaps the 1<sup>st</sup> isn't needed.

<sup>18</sup> Najder, "Conrad and Rousseau," p. 144.

<sup>19</sup> Najder, "Conrad and Rousseau," p. 141.

Rousseau's *Confessions* were assessed by Conrad with scorn as a discredited literary convention because of "the extreme thoroughness he brought to the work of justifying his own existence" (PR 95) and its author was called "an artless moralist" (PR 95).

Discussing the form of his memoirs Conrad, overtly expressed his wish that they not turn into confessions (PR 95). If we use the modern concept of "autobiographical triangle," we can claim that Conrad chose the form of testimony, in which "the narrator tells the reader the story of the world he had known, the people he met and the events he witnessed or heard about, but the focus is on the world described whereas the narrator and the reader are in the background."<sup>20</sup> Thereby he rejects the posture of confession, concentrating on the individual's everyday life.<sup>21</sup>

Additionally, the autobiographic stance of "confession" was for Conrad unacceptable for some other reasons. As he himself admits one of them was the writer's pride.<sup>22</sup> The author who lays bare his emotions in front of a large audience risks incomprehension, rejection or even ridicule. The Polish emigrant feared humiliation stemming from the readers' misunderstanding his cultural otherness. With Conrad this anxiety, which is typical of many *émigré* writers, must have been exceptionally acute because of his specific biography. Indeed, he was composing in a foreign language (which was many a time stressed by his critics),<sup>23</sup> and the act of writing was always extremely strenuous for him, in the wake of which came depression and other diseases.<sup>24</sup> Besides using the language of Shakespeare (although Conrad was

<sup>20</sup> Małgorzata Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt* [Autobiographic Triangle] (Kraków: Universitas 2000), p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt*, p. 21. But at the same time Czermińska emphasises that it is impossible to find one and only one stance in a given work in a pure form and to eliminate the others: "discussing the structure of a given text we can talk only of the domination of one of the poles over the others, but never of the complete exclusion of any of them." Czermińska, *Autobiograficzny trójkąt*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Some of the reasons why Conrad chose specifically this and not some other form of telling a story overlap with the factors which were mentioned by Wiktor Weintraub when he analysed why Aleksander Fredro had also chosen for his memoirs the convention of the seemingly chaotic *gawęda*. W. Weintraub, "Alexander Fredro and His Antiromantic Memoirs," *The American Slavic and East European Review*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1953), p. 540.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the review by one of well-known British critics, R. Lynd: "Mr Conrad, as everybody knows, is a Pole, who writes in English by choice, as it were, rather than by nature... To some of us... it seems a very regrettable thing, even from the point of view of English literature. A writer who ceases to see the world coloured by his own language- for language gives colour to thoughts and things in a way that few people understand- is apt to lose the concentration and intensity of vision without which the greatest literature cannot be made." "Daily News", 10 VIII 1908. Reprinted in *Conrad: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Norman Sherry (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 210.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Conrad's biographies which devote much space to the analyses of the writer's diseases: Bernard Meyer, *Joseph Conrad: A Psychoanalytic Biography* (Princeton: Princeton UP,

at pains to present it as something natural<sup>25</sup>) was grounded in extreme doubt how his texts would be received by native speakers.

Secondly, recalling certain themes and events from his father's (Korzeniowski's) and mother's (Bobrowski's) families was for Conrad intensely painful. Because of the traumatic exile experiences in Russia, sufferings and exile-induced mother's and father's illnesses, early orphanage, as well as untimely deaths of his parents and close relatives (who participated in the January and November Uprisings), Conrad could have found those memories excruciating and was unwilling to write about them directly.<sup>26</sup> Hence, incomprehension or derision ensuing from misunderstanding of those reminiscences would be for Conrad doubly as distressing.

Yet another factor why the author of *Lord Jim* did not want to discuss explicitly his past might have been the accusations of treason thrown in Poland against him. Above all, it was the notorious attack of Eliza Orzeszkowa, published in a weekly *Kraj*, pertaining to a discussion about the so called "emigration of talents." That Conrad felt some uneasiness towards his countrymen and that he might have felt the need of an implicit answer can be observed in his reflections included in the autobiographical volume in which he returns to his decision of leaving Poland to become a sailor:

[F]or why should I, the son of a land which such men as these have turned up with their ploughshares and bedewed with their blood, undertake the pursuit of fantastic meals of salt junk and hard tack upon the wide seas? On the kindest view it seems an unanswerable question. Alas! I have the conviction that there are men of unstained rectitude who are ready to murmur scornfully the word *desertion*. Thus the taste of innocent adventure may be made bitter to the palate. The part of the inexplicable should be allowed for in appraising the conduct of men in a world where no explanation is final. No *charge of faithlessness* ought to be lightly uttered. The appearances of this perishable life are deceptive like everything that falls under the judgement of our imperfect senses. The inner voice may remain true enough in its secret counsel. The *fidelity* to a special tradition may last through the events of an unrelated existence, following *faithfully*, too, the traced way of an inexplicable impulse.

It would take too long to explain the intimate alliance of contradictions in human nature which makes love itself wear at times the desperate shape of *betrayal*. (PR, 35-36, emphasis added)

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1967), Frederick Karl, *Joseph Conrad: The Three Lives. A Biography* and Zdzisław Najder, *Życie Conrada-Korzeniowskiego*.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *A Personal Record*: "The truth of the matter is that my faculty to write in English is as natural as any other aptitude with which I might have been born. I have a strange and overpowering feeling that it had always been an inherent part of myself. English was for me neither a matter of choice nor adoption. The merest idea of choice had never entered my head. And as to adoption – well, yes, there was adoption; but it was I who was adopted by the genius of the language [...]." (PR, v)

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Stanisław Kieniewicz, "Introduction" [Introduction] to Tadeusz Bobrowski, *Pamiętnik mojego życia* [Memoirs] (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1979).



The problem of deserting one's place (be it country or ship) reoccurs in Conrad's fictional works but nowhere is it discussed more explicitly than in his reminiscent notes. It seems to uphold the hypothesis that was put forward in the 1930s and that was grounded in Jungian psychoanalysis, that Conrad had his own "shades and ghosts" which he had to grapple with.<sup>27</sup>

### INTERTEXTUALITY AS A FORM OF A MASK?

Conrad, in contrast to Rousseau, delineating the remembered pictures from his past, did not reject the existing literary tradition and conventions; neither did he regard himself as somebody exceptional, a unique artist, creating a new genre. On the contrary, he wanted to immerse himself in mankind's cultural and literary legacy. Thus, bearing in mind the reasons why Conrad did not want to/could not write overtly about his past it seems well-grounded to claim that literary tradition served as a costume in which he clad multifarious crumbs of the olden days.

Such procedure is evidently a form of intertextuality, applied in order to diminish the confessional mode of his reminiscences. Employing and transforming remembered fragments of texts, motives, pictures or comparisons from literature was for Conrad an almost inborn and unpretentious activity. Belles-lettres permeated his life from early childhood. It begun with little Konradek reading aloud to his father the translations of Shakespeare and Hugo upon which Appolo Korzeniowski worked in exile, and later evolving into independent study of the parental library.<sup>28</sup> This early fascination with books is described by the writer in the following words: "Since the age of five I have been a great reader, as is not perhaps wonderful in a child who was never aware of learning to read. At ten years of age I had read much of Victor Hugo and other romantics. I had read in Polish and in French, history, voyages, novels [...]." (PR 70) To crown it all, Conrad admits that: "Books are an integral part of one's life" (PR 73) which sufficiently, in my opinion, justifies analysing Conrad's autobiography from the intertextual perspective.

On the level of the text, we can distinguish several techniques which enable Conrad to enter into that multi-layered dialogue with literary tradition and whose role is to lessen the confessional character of his autobiography. They are as follows: quotation, paraphrase, travesty and

<sup>27</sup> The hypothesis was formulated by a Swiss psychiatrist Gustav Morf in *The Polish Heritage of Joseph Conrad* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1928). Cf also Gustav Morf, *The Polish Shades and Ghosts of Joseph Conrad* (New York: Astra Books, 1976).

<sup>28</sup> "My first acquaintance was (or were) the 'Two Gentlemen of Verona,' and that in the very MS. of my father's translation." (PR 71)

parody.<sup>29</sup> The most obvious form of intertextuality are quotations which fulfil various functions. However, I would like to broaden the semantic field of this lexical item; thus under the term quotation I will classify not only "repeating or writing the words used by another or used in a book"<sup>30</sup> but also transforming /read translating/ other people's utterances or diaries.

Regarding quotations *sensu stricto*, such passages are enclosed within inverted commas. For instance a line taken from a religious book entitled *Imitation of Christ* written by a German monk, Thomas a Kempis: "there are persons esteemed on their reputation who by showing themselves destroy the opinion one had of them" (*PR* xiii). Conrad used this quote to illustrate his thesis that there can arise two different images of the author created by his friends: one is built upon the basis of his fictional works and it clashes with the other constructed from the novelist's autobiographical writings. The discrepancy between those imaginings results in the disappointment of relatives and friends (*PR* xiii). Here returns like a boomerang the aforesaid anxiety of Conrad's how he (but also his work) will be received by the literary public as well as his concern that he might be misunderstood. The function of this kind of citation is supportive – it is used to uphold the writer's opinions.<sup>31</sup>

Another role of a quotation might be called contrastive: when the author cites a passage only to disagree with it. Emblematic for it is the Marcus Aurelius aphorism: "Let all thy words have the accent of heroic truth" (*PR* xii). Conrad believes that such words are "easier said than done," to use a common saying. Such admonitions could be uttered by kings and emperors while the common man must find for himself a "humble truth":

This is very fine, but I am thinking that it is an easy matter for an austere Emperor to jot down grandiose advice. Most of the working truths on this earth are humble, not heroic; and there have been times in the history of mankind when the accents of heroic truth have moved it to nothing but derision. (*PR* xiii)

Close translation is one more variation of the quoting technique. In Conrad's case this is the rendition from Polish into English extensive parts of his uncle's, Tadeusz Bobrowski's memoirs.<sup>32</sup> To show how close the translation

<sup>29</sup> I have analysed those techniques in detail in „Intertextual Masks in J. Conrad's *A Personal Record*“ (forthcoming).

<sup>30</sup> Albert S. Hornby, *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English* (Oxford: OUP, 1974), vol. II, p. 688.

<sup>31</sup> Henryk Markiewicz, *O cytatach i przypisach* [On Quotations and Footnotes] (Kraków: Universitas, 2004), p. 19.

<sup>32</sup> Tadeusz Bobrowski, *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, vol. I-II, ed. Stanisław Kieniewicz (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, 1979).

is, let us compare just one fragment illustrating the childhood of his guardian and uncle.

Lata niemowlęstwa i dzieciństwa mojego [Tadeusza Bobrowskiego] nie rokowały ani życia, ani zdrowia [...]. Otóż inaczej, sprzecznie z przywideniami ludzkimi, stało się! bo z licznego i daleko zdrowszego rodzeństwa mego czterech braci i dwie siostry przeżyłem, z rówieśników też bardzo wielu, przeżyłem żonę i córkę- a pozostał mi z rodziny tylko brat jeden i siostrzeniec. Wiele więc nadziei pełnych życia do grobu złożyłem przedwcześnie<sup>33</sup>.

For years I remained so delicate that my parents had but little hope of bringing me up; and yet I have survived five brothers and two sisters, and many of my contemporaries; I have outlived my wife and daughter, too – and from all those who have had some knowledge at least of these old times, you alone are left. It has been my lot to lay in an early grave many honest hearts, many brilliant promises, many hopes full of life. (PR 30)

There are more than ten complete stories, which Conrad has rewritten from his guardian's reminiscent papers, and what is more the entire Polish part of *A Personal Record* is loosely based on them. However, even if he copied whole paragraphs word for word, Conrad "developed and adjusted Bobrowski's text, making his anecdotes more pointed and adding lyrical or ironic comments."<sup>34</sup> Most of those loan episodes and details are not signalled by any punctuation marks, so the audience does not know that these excerpts were appropriated by Conrad.

Having traced a large number of unadmitted borrowed fragments, can we accuse Conrad of plagiarism? Yet another puzzling question is why such a creative writer usurped second-hand recollections instead of using his first-hand experience of, at least, the figures of his parents? As regards the accusation of plagiarism, Lejeune maintains that this term should not be applied to autobiographic writing since each autobiography incorporates inestimable portions of the books, paintings, music which the author has previously read, seen or heard. Sometimes the writer is (but very often, is not) aware of the intertextual nature of his reminiscences. To defend autobiography against the defamation of derivativeness and unoriginality, Lejeune coins a new term for this kind of writing, i.e. *l'autobiocopie*.<sup>35</sup> The probable answer to the second query could be that his uncle, Tadeusz Bobrowski, was the major (if not the sole) depositary of the familial memories and traditions for the orphaned child, and later, maturing adolescent. Today we know that many recountals were untrue or deliberately mistaken since the guardian

<sup>33</sup> Bobrowski, *Pamiętnik mojego życia*, vol. I, pp. 8-9.

<sup>34</sup> Najder, "Joseph Conrad and Tadeusz Bobrowski," in: *Conrad in Perspective*, p. 64. In this article, Najder meticulously traces and juxtaposes Conrad's quotations and borrowings from Bobrowski in *A Personal Record*, with their original source, pp. 59-64.

<sup>35</sup> Lejeune, "Autobiokopia," [Autobiocopy] in: *Wariacje na temat*, pp. 219-239.

modified, according to his own prejudices or preferences, the Bobrowskis' and the Korzeniowskis' mythologies for the growing youth.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, one more explanation of Conrad's resorting to his uncle's memories of Ewa and Apollon instead of his own, might be the psychological phenomenon of *Verdrängung* – suppression of the painful or unpleasant experiences or memories from one's past.<sup>37</sup>

To conclude, Conrad's volume of reminiscences can be classified as a form of autobiography. Firstly, it fulfils the distinctive features of this literary convention. Secondly, the writer undertakes a multilayered dialogue with literary tradition by means of rejecting direct autobiographic disclosure, the so called "confession" stance, and favouring indirect presentation of his past on the basis of a panoramic vision of his environment (the people he met, the stories he heard). The pivotal tool for maintaining a distance to the described events is filtering them through literary texts, recollected motives and pictures. Those borrowings from literature constitute specific masks for the author, who does not want to or can't write explicitly about the days gone by. Thus Conrad's *A Personal Record* could be viewed as a an elaborate literary game, which can be played only by readers who know the vast instruction of how to play – the instruction called literature.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Agnieszka Adamowicz-Pośpiech, "Tadeusz Bobrowski: Conrad's Positive Mecaenas or Negative Mentor?" *Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny*, L (2003) 4, p. 486-504. In this article I discussed the complicated relationship between the uncle-cum-guardian, T. Bobrowski and the nephew-cum-ward, Conrad-Korzeniowski. I also presented some of the incorrect narratives created by Bobrowski concerning Conrad's parents and their erroneous reiterations on the pages of *A Personal Record*.

<sup>37</sup> Jolande Jacobi, *Psychologia C. G. Junga*, [C. G. Jung's Psychology] trans. Stanisław Łypacewicz (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Ewa Korczewska, 1996), pp. 173-175.